

Mr. Speaker, what a monumental achievement to be married for 50 years. It is an honor to represent a couple like the Linck's—they are an inspiration to us all in southern Illinois and I am proud to represent them in the U.S. House of Representatives.

POWER VACUUM AT PANAMA CANAL

HON. PETER T. KING

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 6, 1997

Mr. KING. Mr. Speaker, on October 5, 1997 The New York Times ran an interesting story by Larry Rohter on a power vacuum developing at the Panama Canal. The importance of the Canal to the United States' economic interests should not be underestimated with over 200,000 jobs in our Nation dependent on a safe and efficient Canal operation. For example, one out of every four vessels entering or leaving the Port of New York and New Jersey transits the Panama Canal.

I commend to my colleagues the Rohter story with the hope that officials at the Pentagon will not neglect our responsibilities in Panama over the next 27 months.

[From the New York Times, October 5, 1997]

AS PANAMA CANAL TRANSFER NEARS, MORE JOCKEYING TO FILL A POWER VACUUM

(By Larry Rohter)

MIAMI, Oct. 4.—The sudden resignation of the chairman of the Panama Canal Commission, with barely two years remaining before the United States yields control of the vital waterway, has created a power vacuum that Panama is now maneuvering to fill, American officials and current and former canal officials say.

Meeting in a closed session here this week, the nine-member binational body, created by the Panama Canal Treaties 20 years ago, chose the United States Secretary of the Army, Togo D. West, Jr., to succeed Joe R. Reeder, an American, who resigned on Sept. 15.

But in a nod to Panama's increasingly assertive posture regarding the running of the canal, the board also created a new position, that of vice chairman, and named a Panamanian, Jorge E. Ritter, to the job.

As Minister of State for Canal Affairs and a member of the commission's board, Mr. Ritter is already the Panamanian Government's principal negotiator on canal matters. This summer, President Ernesto Perez Balladares enhanced Mr. Ritter's already considerable influence by naming him director of the Panama Canal Authority, the entity that will assume management of the waterway when the United States hands it over to Panama on Dec. 31, 1999.

Mr. West, on the other hand, is relatively new to canal matters and remains preoccupied with the Army's sexual harassment scandals, the deployment of American troops in Bosnia and a host of other issues. This has led to concerns among some shipping executives and other canal specialists that he will be unable to devote the time required to supervise the handover properly and to assure that the Canal Treaties are properly implemented.

"It makes no sense in the heavy-duty transition that is under way to have the Secretary of the Army as chairman of the Canal Commission," said Robert R. McMillan, Mr. Reeder's predecessor as board chairman. "There is no way he can do justice to the po-

sition, no matter how many colonels from his retinue he has swarming around the Canal. With this job, it's hands on or nothing; you can't tune in just for board meetings and be an effective chairman."

In a telephone interview Friday, Mr. West, a lawyer and former general counsel of the Department of Defense, said his new post "has always been a part-time job" and that "the occasions on which the chairmanship was the sole duty of whoever held it are rare, if any." Naming a Panamanian as vice chairman "probably should have been done before now," he added, and "provides a further sign of the spirit of cooperation" between the two countries.

"We have every confidence that Secretary West will be fully capable of handling his responsibilities as Secretary of the Army as well as chairman of the Panama Canal Commission board of directors," said Capt. Michael Doubleday, a Defense Department spokesman in Washington.

Captain Doubleday noted that former Army Secretary Michael P. Stone also served as chairman of the Panama Canal commission's board, from early 1990 to January 1993.

Like Mr. Pérez Balladares' other nominees to the future Canal Authority, which include four members of his or his wife's family, Mr. Ritter has close ties to the President and the governing Democratic Revolutionary Party. During the rabidly anti-American dictatorship of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, who was then leader of the party, Mr. Ritter was Panama's Ambassador to Colombia and then Foreign Minister.

In 1992, after the American invasion that toppled and captured him, General Noriega was convicted here of drug trafficking, racketeering and money laundering to aid Colombian drug cartels and was sentenced to 40 years in prison. During his trial, a witness testified that Mr. Ritter, using his diplomatic privileges while Ambassador in Bogotá, had purchased a Mercedes-Benz on behalf of a leading Colombian drug dealer in return for \$50,000. Mr. Ritter has denied that he did anything improper.

"Having to deal with Jorge Ritter is a sizable assignment," one American official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "That's why it is vitally important to the national interest to have someone in place who can really focus on the situation on a day-to-day basis and provide continuity all the way through 1999."

Canal officials say that Panama viewed Mr. Reeder's departure, which American officials attributed to tensions between him and Mr. West, as an opportunity to strengthen its presence on the commission. There had even been informal suggestions that the new chairman be a Panamanian, they said, which led to negotiations aimed at avoiding a show of discord at the body's next public meeting, scheduled to take place in New York this month.

Mr. West said that "if there was any such discussion in the margins, I had no sign of that." He described Mr. Ritter as "a very impressive person, intellectually very sharp, the right person to do this job," but, when asked if he himself expected to remain as chairman of the commission through 1999, he did not answer directly.

"There is every intention for all of us to be a stabilizing and not a destabilizing influence," he said. Though "neither I nor the Administration have any present plans for me not to see this through," he added, "the half life of political appointees in any administration is of such a nature that I have already exceeded my expected term."

DON PIENKOS, 1997 OUTSTANDING AMERICAN OF POLISH DESCENT

HON. GERALD D. KLECZKA

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 6, 1997

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in heartfelt tribute to my good friend, Don Pienkos, who has been honored by the National Polish Alliance's Milwaukee Society as the 1997 Outstanding American of Polish Descent.

Don has for many years played such an important role in the Polish-American community in the Milwaukee area and nationally. He's been on the board of directors for the Polish National Alliance and is very involved with its Milwaukee Society. He is also active in the Polish American Congress and Milwaukee's Polishfest festival. Dr. Pienkos has also long been a supporter of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America and the Kosciuszko Foundation.

Currently the director of undergraduate studies for the Political Science Department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Don Pienkos' special area of interest is Eastern Europe and the nations of the former Soviet Union. He has taught at UWM for nearly 30 years, working to instill in his students an appreciation for and understanding of Eastern European politics and culture. In addition, he helped organize UWM's committees on Russian and Eastern European studies, as well as Polish studies.

As a natural outgrowth of his interest, knowledge and pride in his Polish heritage, Don has authored several books on Poland and on Polish-American organizations. These informative works provide us with wonderful accounts of the efforts Polish-Americans have made on behalf of the Polish people and fellow Polish-Americans.

Most recently, Don has been active in Poland's struggle to rebuild its government and economy after the fall of eastern bloc communism. He has worked with elected community leaders from Poland to train them in local democratic government and was in Poland to observe and write about their 1995 elections. Don was also honored to have met with President Clinton and Vice-President GORE to discuss North Atlantic Treaty Organization enlargement, and has worked hard toward the goal of full NATO membership for Poland.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to honor Professor Donald Pienkos for his outstanding work in the Polish-American community. I congratulate him on being awarded the Milwaukee Society's Outstanding American of Polish descent and extend my best wishes for a successful Pulaski Day celebration and continued success for years to come. Sto Lat!

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

HON. RON KIND

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 6, 1997

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, today we begin the 6th week of legislation business since returning from the August district work period. Each weekend I return home to western Wisconsin